

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
As a Committee of the Whole
THURSDAY, MAY 27, 2021, at 6:30 p.m.
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
WOBURN CITY HALL

Voting Members present: Chairman Darlene Mercer-Bruen, Alderman Michael Concannon, Alderman Robert Ferullo, Alderman Joanne Campbell, Alderman Richard Gately, Alderman Jeffrey Dillon, Alderman Joseph Demers, and President Edward Tedesco. Absent: Alderman Michael Lannan

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Discussion of the FY 2022 Budget: Alderman Concannon said he would like to make a disclosure based on information he gleaned from the state Ethics Commission. He said he inquired with the commission and based on that inquiry he said he is able to deliberate and vote on the budget, except in the instances there are line items that directly involve family members, in which case he should recuse himself. Chairman Mercer-Bruen asked if any other members of the committee wished to make a similar disclosure. President Tedesco, Alderman Ferullo, Alderman Dillon and Alderman Demers answered affirmatively. **Mayor** - Chairman Mercer-Bruen said the mayor's departmental budget is on page 2. Mayor Scott Galvin said the only line item of note in his departmental budget is for contractual salary adjustments. Alderman Campbell asked if the mayor plans on hiring an administrative assistant. Mayor Galvin responded Dianne Mearls has been working as his assistant since Marie Lingblom was hired as the Council on Aging Director. He said Ms. Mearls was formerly the assistant in the Law Dept. and he is looking for someone to fill that role. Alderman Gately asked about the increased line item for salary adjustments. Mayor Galvin said the line item is approximately \$800,000 for employee raises. He said his departmental budget is otherwise level funded. **Auditor** – Chairman Mercer-Bruen said the Auditor's budget is on page 4. City Auditor Charles Doherty said his departmental budget increased by 0.49 percent. He said there are three salary increases; two for employees who made their fifth year of service time and another who made her 20th year of service time. He said there is a \$4,000 to the GASB 43/45 line item. He said there was a cut to \$30,000 for Medicaid direct billing. **Treasurer/Collector** – Chairman Mercer-Bruen said the Treasurer/Collector's budget is on page 7. Treasurer/Collector Timothy Donovan said his departmental budget is level-funded with no increases except for a slight increase in lock box fees. He said he wants to recognize his staff for their efforts as front-line workers. He said the Treasurer/Collector's office has been open since July. He said the city did an excellent job instituting necessary protections. He said his staff works hard and is dedicated. He said there have been no issues or problems related to Covid. He said real estate tax collections seem to be consistent with previous years. He said collection of excise taxes is down, and investments are down in concert with interest rates. Alderman Gately said it has been a bad year for everyone. He asked there has been an increase in people not paying their taxes. Treasurer/Collector Donovan said there has not been a significant increase in delinquencies. He said payment of the last quarter real estate taxes has been extended until the end of the fiscal year. He said there has been an increase in the number of bankruptcy filings, but there has been no correlation to residents being behind on real estate tax payments. **Council on Aging** - Alderman Mercer-Bruen said the

Council on Aging's budget is on page 50. Council on Aging Director Marie Lingblom said her departmental budget is also level funded. She said some of her expenditures are covered by grants. She said she would like to acknowledge her staff, as well as Paul Medeiros and Len Burnham of the DPW. She said the Senior Center was still able to provide critical services in spite of the pandemic. She said the staff tried to keep things clean. She said staff has been outstanding. She said the van drivers are seeing an increase in demand as Covid restrictions are curtailing. She said they tried to have more events outside, including a victory garden in back of the building. She said they plan to bring back Bingo soon. She said other programs like art and woodworking will also be returning on a staggered basis. She said exercise programs will be returning. She said the Human Resources Dept. obtained a licensed social worker. She said blood pressure clinics will return. She said the private meeting room is looking great. She said initially there will be 2-hour time limits. She said she is deeply grateful for everyone's support. Chairman Mercer-Bruen said the COA also handled vaccinations and did an outstanding job. Director Lingblom said approximately 800 senior citizens were vaccinated. She said that is something to be proud of. She said the COA is lucky to get the level of support it does from the city. Alderman Gately said Director Lingblom and her staff are doing a wonderful job. He said he has heard nothing but good comments. He said the COA did a fabulous job during the pandemic. He said to keep up the good work. Alderman Campbell said she is curious about what social distancing. Director Lingblom said some communities will not be opening until the fall. She said she has talked to Building Commissioner Thomas Quinn about occupancy. She said the Senior Center will be running with limited capacity. She said there will be a limit of 12 people in a small room and 30-50 in a large room to start, and they will see how it goes. She said she has put together a list of policies and procedures. She said people will be encouraged to meet outside. She said by and large, everyone wants to come back. She said masks will not be mandatory. She said she is starting to get calls from people about activities. Alderman Campbell said she likes the Senior Center bulletin. Director Lingblom said Michelle Rodriguez is in charge of the bulletin. Alderman Campbell said the bulletin is put together well. She said Ms. Rodriguez does a nice job. Alderman Ferullo thanked Director Lingblom for her leadership and compassion. **Assessors** - Chief Assessor John Connolly said he would like to thank a Board of Assessors – Chairman Robert Maguire, who he said is in the audience, Lori Medeiros, and David Rufo – as well as the departmental staff. He said staff has been outstanding. He said the office has been open to the public and customer service has been outstanding. He said they are assessing 13,000 real estate properties, 18,000 units of personal property and 40,000 excise tax bills, in accordance with state Dept. of Revenue requirements. He said the only increases in his departmental budget are for a total of \$4,000 across two line items. He said there was a large court case involving NStar and the City of Boston which approved a 50/50 valuation. He said the case was heavily contested. Alderman Gately asked if a vacant appraiser's position will be filled. Chief Assessor Connolly said he has been struggling to fill his old position. He said there are only 600 certified appraisers left in the state. He said it is difficult to find qualified help. He said the city has a lot of intricate properties that may make the job less attractive. He said they hope to have the position filled but they have not found anyone. Alderman Gately asked what former Chief Assessor Andrew Creen's role is. Chief Assessor Connolly said Mr. Creen is working in the field and is helping out in the office. He said Mr. Creen is a good resource to have and he knows the business. He said there has been an exodus of appraisers throughout the state. Alderman Gately said the Assessors office covers a lot of buildings, and that is not easy. He said the department does a great job. Alderman Campbell asked why people no longer want to become assessors. Chief

Appraiser Connolly said in order to become a certified assessor, one needs experience, course credits and to pass an exam. He said the process takes five years, and not a lot of young people are getting into the field, while older people are getting out. Alderman Campbell asked how this issue gets resolved. Chief Assessor Connolly said he does not know. He said it is a big problem. Alderman Concannon asked if there are any real estate trends this year. Chief Assessor Connolly said there is an increase in new growth. He said along with the increased revenue from the electrical lines, this should be a good year for personal property revenue. **Fire Dept.** – Fire Chief Donald Kenton said his departmental budget is pretty much level-funded. He said there is a 1.15 percent increase mostly attributed to salary increases, longevity and sick leave buy back. He said the maintenance budget has decreased a little bit. Alderman Ferullo said the Fire Dept.'s level of professionalism is remarkable. He asked about the status of turnout gear. Chief Kenton said turnout gear is being addressed in the capital budget. Alderman Ferullo asked if the new heavy rescue unit will be stocked with standard equipment. Chief Kenton responded the new rescue unit will be supplied with the equipment that will be required initially. Alderman Ferullo said he is concerned about the response time to North Woburn, which is trending toward a more residential demographic. Chief Kenton said the new fire station is being built and he thinks there will be similar response times. He said there should be an inquiry into long-term trends in the city's population trends. Alderman Gately thanked Chief Kenton and his department for all they do. He said the department has come a long way in the past 10-12 years. He said the Fire Dept.'s personnel are well-trained. He said firefighters in the city know exactly what they are doing. He thanked them for protecting the city. Alderman Dillon said there are few jobs in the city that require employees to worry about whether they will come home at night. He said the Fire Dept. is doing a great job. Alderman Campbell said she wants to echo Alderman Ferullo's concerns about the Commerce Way area. She asked if the department is making any short-term adjustments until the new fire station is finished. Chief Kenton said a second ambulance is running 24/7. **Purchasing** – Purchasing Agent Orazio DeLuca said his departmental budget is level-funded. He said his department is doing OK. He said they make it work. He said they are using different maneuvers to get to the end result. He said he is fine with being level funded. Alderman Gately said he saw an advertisement in the newspaper about a bid for cemetery maintenance. He asked if that contract has been awarded. Agent DeLuca said the city got 5-6 bids from different vendors. He said the maintenance contract will save the city between \$25,000-\$30,000. Alderman Gately asked who won the bid. Agent DeLuca said the company that won the bid is Grandmaster. He said they are located in Stoneham. He said they are local people. Alderman Gately said he participated in a walk-through of the cemetery and was happy with the results. **DPW/Cemetery** – Chairman Mercer-Bruen said the DPW budget starts on page 33. Representing the DPW were Supt. John Duran and Deputy Supt. Leonard Burnham. Representing the Cemetery Commission was Chairman John Sawyer. Supt. Duran said there were a couple of decreases in the budget for items like gasoline and lighting. He said three or four line items are decreasing. He said the overtime line item changed but it is essentially the same budget. Alderman Gately said it appears the DPW roster is short a few employees and asked Supt. Duran if he plans to fill those positions. Supt. Duran said several employees have left recently. He said the DPW is in the market for new employees. He said as long as he has been DPW superintendent, he refuses to hire just anyone. He said there are currently three open positions. He said he would like to speak to the mayor about adding a fourth position. Alderman Gately asked about the status of the water system. Supt. Duran said the city continues to make improvements to the water system. He said some of the regulations regarding water are

changing. He said they are trying to stay ahead of the curve. Alderman Gately asked if Supt. Duran if he read a newspaper article about chemicals in the water in Burlington. Supt. Duran said Woburn tests its water quality more than anyone else in the state. He said Woburn goes to great lengths to protect his water supply. He said he does not want to be in the next movie about Woburn's water, and neither does Water Treatment Plant Manager Anthony Blazejewski. He said they are in the middle of a flushing program. He said he likes to think Woburn is ahead of the curve. Alderman Dillon said one of the most important roles for an alderman is helping people navigate the system. He said he has always received a positive response from the DPW. Alderman Demers said he also appreciates the responses he has gotten from the DPW, even when it is a small thing. He said the DPW responds quickly and always gets done what it needs to do. He said the DPW's efforts are especially appreciated during the pandemic. Supt. Duran said Deputy Supt. Burnham has been invaluable. He said Deputy Supt. Burnham has met or exceeded all of his expectations. He said he has a good staff. President Tedesco thanked Supt. Duran and Deputy Supt. Burnham for all the help they have given him during his past five years as an alderman. Chairman Mercer-Bruen said she wants to echo the compliments for Supt. Duran and Deputy Supt. Burnham. She said she thinks she talks to Deputy Supt. Burnham once a day. She said there is a lot of stuff that happens behind the scenes that people do not know about. Chairman Mercer-Bruen asked about the transition of the Cemetery Dept. to the DPW. Supt. Duran said much has been accomplished and there is still much to accomplish. He said the grounds have been cleaned up. He said staffing issues have been addressed. He said he thinks there will be even more of a dramatic improvement. He said things are headed in the right direction. Alderman Campbell thanked Supt. Duran for the DPW's efforts.

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Order to transfer \$249,000 from Fire/BLS Ambulance Acct to Fire/Ambulance Salary Acct \$80,000, Fire O/T Salary Acct \$120,000, Fire 16th Man O/T Acct \$15,000, Apparatus Maintenance Acct \$5,000, and Hazardous Clothing Acct \$29,000: President Tedesco said that even though Chief Kenton has left the chamber, this is a standard request and made a motion that the transfer "ought to pass," seconded by Alderman Demers and approved, 8-0.

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MOTION made by Alderman Concannon and seconded by Alderman Ferullo to adjourn; approved, 8-0. Chairman Mercer-Bruen adjourned the meeting at 7:22 p.m.

A TRUE RECORD ATTEST

Gordon Vincent
Clerk of Committees